

Coming to America: The Next Wave of Immigrants

By Thomas Jones

Imagine if you will, the 'War on Terrorism' is a distant memory; the majority of U.S. troops have returned home and life in most communities has returned back to normal. Your community experienced a significant change in demographics after the war when thousands of Iraqi citizens relocated to your city.

To set the stage for the daily issues you face when you arrive at work: There is a considerable amount of stress between the police management and the Police Officers Association. The Association members are upset they are being ordered to attend diversity training. The training had been mandated by the Saadat Decree; after community leaders from the Iraqi community were successful in a lawsuit filed against the police department. The lawsuit outlined a series of incidents of harassment by the police department towards Iraqi migrants. The Iraqi community and the police department were already having problems after a series of high profile hate crimes against the members of the Iraqi community went unsolved.

Officers are upset over the importance being placed on providing extra patrol services to the newly formed Iraqi neighborhoods. Some officers are of the opinion a disproportionate amount of time is being spent providing private security for the newest members of the community at the expense of others.

The Iraqi community had been the target of some misplaced hatred and violence after a bombing at a local business. A number of Chaldean businessmen were arrested in a bookmaking operation; which was spearheaded by the vice unit. Officers shot an Iraqi gang member when he advanced toward the plain clothes officers with a knife. All-in-all, things were not going well between the Iraqi community and the police. Several community meetings have turned into shouting matches between the neighborhood officers and the community members. Tired of dealing with this issue, the City Council is demanding for a change in the leadership of the police department.

The above-described scenario is obviously fiction, yet it isn't completely out of the realm of possibility. Would your police department be prepared for such a drastic change in demographics? Long Beach Police Department did not expect 50,000 Cambodians to relocate to their community. Glendale Police Department would not have expected to be providing law enforcement services to a predominantly Armenian community. Little did the Garden Grove and Westminster Police expect their communities would be forever changed at the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Following a period of social upheaval, immigration from Iraq to the United States is a foreseeable future.

According to State Department data reported by the Immigration and Refugee Services of America, 32,187 Iraqis entered the United States between 1989 and 2002. Several thousand more have been granted refugee status after entering, a status granted when it is

determined someone has fled their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution political opinion.¹

If based on race, religion, national origin, membership of a particular social group, or there are currently a number of Iraqi families living in your community, you may want to prepare for the possibility of an influx of post-war Iraqi migrants to your jurisdiction or at the bare minimum discuss the ramifications of such an event. If you think you aren't likely to be affected, consider how dispersed the Iraqi-American population has become throughout the United States. The cities with the largest Iraqi immigrant populations are Detroit, Chicago, and San Diego. Detroit had the largest number of Iraqi foreign born (30,569), according to Census 2000, followed by Chicago (9,513) and San Diego (7,507). The remaining seven cities with the largest Iraqi immigrant populations include Los Angeles (5,499), Phoenix/Mesa (2,343), Nashville (2,143), Washington, DC (1,797), New York (1,507), San Jose (1,175), and Dallas (1,056).²

Table 1 Ten Cities with the Largest Iraqi Foreign-Born Populations, 2000			
Cities	Number of Iraqi Foreign Born	Total Foreign-Born Population	Percentage of Total That Is Iraqi
Detroit, MI	30,569	335,107	9.12%
Chicago, IL	9,513	1,425,978	0.67%
San Diego, CA	7,507	606,254	1.24%
Los Angeles, CA	5,499	3,449,444	0.16%
Phoenix, Mesa, AZ	2,343	457,483	0.51%
Nashville, TN	2,143	57,614	3.72%
Washington, DC	1,797	832,016	0.22%
New York, NY	1,507	3,139,647	0.05%
San Jose, CA	1,175	573,130	0.20%
Dallas, TX	1,056	591,169	0.18%

¹ Iraqi Immigrants in the United States, (April, 2003) Migration Policy Institute, {online} accessed

² Ibid

‘The War on Terrorism’

Since 2001, the United States has been waging its War on Terrorism, with no discernable end in sight. While (like most military conflicts) there is not a universally accepted reason for being at war, most agree the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and in a field in the Pennsylvania countryside warranted a response from America against those responsible. The attacks were carried out by 19 militant Islamic fanatics thought to be under the control of terrorist leader Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organization.³

In the months after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush referenced an ‘axis of evil’ constituted by Iraq, Iran and North Korea. In the case of Iraq, the target of such intervention appeared to be the regime, indeed the person, of Saddam Hussein.⁴ Dictator of Iraq until his capture by U.S. troops in 2004, Hussein’s tenure was rife with exclusivity, communal mistrust, patronage, and the exemplary use of violence. In addition, Iraq has a history of a system of dependence on and conformity with the will of a small number of men at the centre of the state on the name of social discipline and national destiny.⁵

Hussein’s alleged relationship with Osama Bin Laden and his failure to cooperate with the United Nation inspectors who were being denied the opportunity to inspect sites within Iraq believed to contain weapons of mass destruction, provided President Bush the

³ Schmallerer, F. (2005) “Criminal Justice Today; An Introductory Text for the 21st Century” New Jersey; Prentice Hall, P.6-7.

⁴ Trip, Charles, A History of Iraq, (New York; Cambridge Press, 2005), p.285.

⁵ Ibid.

needed justification to bring the “war on terrorism” into Iraq. Inevitably, the conflict in that country affects those who have nothing to do with the geopolitics of terror, and want nothing more than safe streets, safe schools and to be left alone to raise their families without fear. Facing the prospect of continued warfare in their homeland, numbers of Iraqis, like so many before them, may turn to the “land of freedom” to find a better life.

A Brief History of Iraq and the Demographic Breakdown of the Iraqi People

The present day Iraq was known in history as Mesopotamia, the land between two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. The country borders Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. Iraq is approximately 168,023 square miles; making it slightly larger in size than California. The most populated cities in Iraq are Baghdad (5,772,000 people), Al Basrah, which is located in the South East region (1,337,000 people) and Mosul, which is located in the North region (1,739,800 people). ⁶

There are four main ethnic groups in Iraq; the Arabs, the Kurds, the Assyrians/Chaldeans, and the Turkoman. The Arabs are the largest group consisting of approximately 18.5 million people. They are descendants from nomadic Bedouin tribes. Their culture is closely intertwined with the religion of Islam. Approximately 65 % of the Arabs are Shia Muslim while the remaining 35 % are Sunni Muslim. ⁷

The Kurds make up the second largest ethnic group in Iraq. There are currently 5 million Kurds in Iraq. The Kurds are ethnically distinct from Arabs, Turks, and Persians

⁶ Iraq; Transitional Handbook, (Washington D.C.; Department of Defense, 2003) P.5.

⁷ Iraqi; Cultural Smart Guide, (Virginia; United States Marine Corps).

(Iranians). The term “Kurd” was originally used to denote non-Arab nomads. They speak Kurdish, which is distinct from Arabic and Turkish; similar to Persian. Most are Sunni Muslims.⁸

The third largest ethnic groups are the Assyrians/Chaldeans. There are approximately 800,000 Chaldeans in Iraq. They are Christians, who claim to be heirs to the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia. They live in the urban areas and throughout northern Iraq.⁹ Interestingly, there are more than one hundred and fifty thousand Chaldeans in the United States. One hundred thousand have relocated to the greater Detroit area, thirty thousand in San Diego County and the remaining spread out through the Country. The majority migrated to the United States from one village in Northern Iraq, named Telkaif.¹⁰ The migration of Chaldeans to the United States made national news In September, 2000 when during a two-month period, one hundred and seventy-two Iraqi Chaldeans requested political asylum in the United States. The Chaldean Christians were seeking political asylum in the United States because of religious persecution in Iraq, which is predominantly Muslim.¹¹

The smallest of the four main ethnic groups in Iraq are the Turkomans. They are ethnically related to the Turks and Azeris. Sixty-six percent of Turkomans are Sunni Muslims, with the remaining 33 percent Shia Muslims. Their primary language is

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jihad, Sami Dr. , *The Chaldeans; Their Tradition, Customs, and Practices*, 2003

¹¹ More Iraqi Christians cross U.S. border from Mexico, (September 21, 2000) CNN.Com{online} accessed

Turkish; however most are fluent in Arabic. Most of the Turkoman live in Iraq's northern cities.

Sunnis dominated Iraq under Saddam Hussein's regime. Majority Shiite, oppressed for centuries by successive Sunni rulers have come to the political fore since the U.S. led invasion ended Iraq's political order nearly three years ago.¹² Majority Shiites and minority Kurds generally support the Shiite-dominated government, while Sunni Arabs dominate the ranks of the insurgents.¹³ Given the instability likely to continue in the region for years to come, the migration of Chaldeans to escape the whims of the ruling class may merely portend a much larger movement of others to America. When they arrive, there is no doubt they will find a justice system remarkably different than the one they left behind.

Challenges to Law Enforcement

Iraqi immigrants have found a completely different style of law enforcement than they had experienced in Iraq. In Iraq, as in many other countries with insurgent populations, the police are much like soldiers and will continue to use "combat policing" methods in some areas, while seeking to gain support and help from the public in more secured communities. In theocracies and dictatorships, policing will remain dedicated to protecting and serving the needs of those in power.¹⁴

¹² Daragahi, Borzou, Sunnis Accuse Shiites in Mass Killings, Los Angeles Times, 2/5/06, p. A-12.

¹³ Reid, Robert, Clash Between Shiites, Sunnis leave 15 Dead, North County Times, 10/28/05, p.A-3.

¹⁴ Stevens, Gene, Policing the Future; Law Enforcements' New Challenges, The Futurists, March-April, 2005, p.-53.

Typically migrants to the United States from Iraq will live with another Iraqi family upon their arrival in the Country. The host family will educate the new immigrant on the laws and customs of the United States. As more and more families migrate from Iraq, this practice may become impractical. Learning from the experiences of other police departments who have found themselves providing police services to large number of first generation immigrants, police departments can expect the Iraqi immigrants to be unfamiliar with U.S. law enforcement, laws and the courts system. An informative example of issues seen with the dramatic increase in immigrants' residents may be seen in the cities of El Cajon and Long Beach, CA.

The El Cajon Experience

El Cajon, California has seen the Iraqi population in the City of El Cajon grow to over thirty thousand people. According to El Cajon Detective Rich Rouleau, the majority of their Iraqi community is Chaldean; however, they have residents from all four of the main Iraqi ethnic groups. Rouleau states the Chaldeans generally enter the United States through the International Border with Mexico, requesting political asylum based on their statements they are being persecuted in their country for their Christian beliefs.

Rouleau, who has worked with this community on a number of occasions, says there have been crime issues in several areas. He states some of the Iraqis who have been in the United States for a number of years will victimize the new Iraqi migrants, who are unfamiliar with U.S. customs and practices. Rouleau said Iraqi women are treated poorly by their husbands, and domestic violence is prevalent in their culture. According to

intelligence obtained by the El Cajon Police Department, a number of Iraqis are involved in the illegal sales of cigarettes, selling counterfeit DVDs, and in the trafficking of marijuana and cocaine. It is unacceptable in the Iraqi culture to use these drugs, but the trafficking of narcotics is acceptable means of making money.

Rouleau states his Department has provided limited roll call training to their officers on the Iraqi culture, but the average officer on the street typically has minimal contact with this segment of their community. He did add female police officers have a difficult time developing relationships with the Iraqi men based on their lack of respect of working women.

The Long Beach Experience

The City of Long Beach, California also experienced a dramatic change in their demographics when thousands of Cambodians migrated to the City in the mid-1970s. Both, the members of the law enforcement community and the members of the Cambodian community, experienced the cultural differences between the two countries. The Long Beach Police Department found that the Cambodian immigrants thought nothing of stealing animals and fruit from each other. Child abuse and domestic violence, both which was acceptable in their homeland, were now getting them arrested. The new immigrants believed local law enforcement to be corrupt, based on their experience with the police in Cambodia. Gambling was perfectly acceptable in the Cambodian culture. There was little cooperation with law enforcement, causing most a number of crimes within the Cambodian community to go unsolved.

According to Retired Long Beach Police Chief Jerome Lance a number of the police procedures were difficult for the new Cambodians immigrants to adopt. It was the practice of the Long Beach Police Department to place suspects on their knees prior to searching or handcuffing them; in the Cambodian culture, it was common practice to place a person on their knees and then execute them. The Long Beach Police officers found themselves having to use force routinely when they attempted to place the Cambodian migrants on their knees. Additionally, in Cambodia it was a sign of disrespect not to approach a police officer during a traffic stop. This cultural difference also caused problems as officers drew their firearms when Cambodian drivers during a traffic stop exited their vehicle and immediately approached the officers.

Frustration was also experienced by law enforcement officials who were not familiar with the culture of the Cambodian people. There was a communication gap due to the original lack of Cambodian speaking officers. Additionally, the officers had to respond to complaints from the Cambodian community for failing to solve crimes while the officers' frustration with the lack of cooperation grew.¹⁵ Much like the immigration of Cambodians fleeing the killing fields of their civil war, the possibilities of an influx of Iraqi citizens migrating to California exist. Police officers are the most visible form of government in this country and will be impacted by a significant influx of immigrants. Law enforcement agencies can emulate those agencies before them who have managed a multitude of issues as a result of first generation immigrants moving to the United States. If necessary, agencies may need to develop new strategies to address issues that will inevitably arise in their community with a sudden change in their demographics.

¹⁵ Lance, Jerome, Retired Police Chief of Long Beach, Interview on 1/10/06.

The Long Beach Police Department's strategic plan for developing a partnership with the Cambodian community is a model still worth copying twenty years later. The Police Department was one of the first California law enforcement agencies to provide cultural awareness training to its members. According to Community Relations Officer Eric Sing, who was the third Cambodian migrant hired by the Department, the Department also partnered with the local media. Sing stated the local television station and the policed department produced a public access show which educated the Cambodian community on the practices of local law enforcement. The show explained how to report a crime, what services the police department provided, and most importantly, how to act when approached by a police officer. Sing stated the police department also had a weekly column in the local Asian newspaper educating the new migrants on law enforcement in the United States. Additionally, the Chief of Police developed the Chief-Asia Advisory Group; the group met monthly to discuss issues between the community and the police department. Long Beach's efforts may serve as a foundation for others to consider how they might lead the transition of immigrant communities into their infrastructure.

A Transition Plan

To effectively provide police services to all citizens, police departments must develop, promote, and encourage a positive working relationship with all segments of the community. The Iraqi citizens who migrate to California after the war in search of a better life for themselves and their families will be experiencing a tremendous cultural change. To better prepare law enforcement and the Iraqi community for a healthy

working relationship, the following objectives have been identified by representatives of the Iraqi-American community and law enforcement representatives¹⁶

- To promote a positive working relationship with the Iraqi community through enhanced communication and partnerships
- To empower the Iraqi community to become involved in law enforcement through participation in the volunteer program
- To assist the Iraqi community to become familiar with local, State and Federal laws and the judicial system
- To increase the number, and quality, of advanced officer training courses to include strategies to effectively work with the Iraqi community, and develop updated cultural diversity training
- To educate the Iraqi community members on identifying signs of drug and gang involvement. This program could be a collaborative effort with public safety, the Iraqi community, the schools, and the churches.

These migrants will be entering a country where the law enforcement and judicial system is vastly different from the country they departed. By partnering with law enforcement, the best approach to achieve some initial understanding is to provide education to law enforcement officials of the Iraqi culture and education to the Iraqis on our culture, specifically as it applies to the laws and police. This strategy can be attained by developing a partnership with law enforcement officials, Iraqi community and church

¹⁶ Nominal Group Technique Panel, Conducted in October, 2005 at the Oceanside Police Department, California.

leaders, education professionals and professional trainers to prepare a curriculum for both diversity training for police officials and training for the Iraqi community members.

The second alternate strategy would be to develop a police resource center in the Iraqi community. The resource center would be staffed by a neighborhood officer, who would be responsible for coordinating all the needs of the Iraqi community and ensuring their issues are addressed. A number of officers, professional staff, and volunteers from the Iraqi community would be assigned to the resource center.

The value in this strategy is the Center would be located in the Iraqi community and volunteers from the Iraqi community would be available to assist law enforcement in becoming accustomed to the Iraqi culture and assist the Iraqi community members to understand law enforcement practices in California. The volunteers would also be available to provide translation for the officers. Although an Iraqi Resource Center might be a novel undertaking, there are successful examples of private-police partnerships, or readily available advocacy groups, from which to draw to serve as roadmaps for possible development. Here are just two examples.

Oceanside, California

The Oceanside Police Department, California has experienced success operating Resource Centers in three predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods. The City of Oceanside's population is about 31 percent Hispanic. Many Hispanics who relocate to Oceanside are first generation immigrants who are unfamiliar with California law

enforcement. The Police Department offers classes in domestic violence and child abuse issues, traffic laws (with a specific emphasis on drinking and driving) and a Police Citizens Academy. All of these classes are offered in Spanish. The Police Department partners with a number of social service agencies in operating these facilities. The centers are staffed by neighborhood police officers and volunteers from the community. According to Oceanside Police Sergeant Ruben Sandoval, who has overseen the operation of these resource centers, a number of the volunteers are community members who have has positive experiences with the police and want to improve the quality of life for those living in the neighborhood.

San Diego County's Kurdish Human Rights Watch

In San Diego County an organization known as the Kurdish Human Rights Watch, Inc. (KHRW) was established in 1996. The organization was established to provide services to the refugee community in San Diego; their main objective is to help refugees and immigrants rely on their own resources to become self-sufficient. According to the KHRW's website, "Refugees encounter many hardships during their first years of resettlement. Finding adequate employment, learning to speak English and family reunification are examples some of the challenges that refugees face. The target population in the East County San Diego is composed of 85 percent Middle Eastern newcomers such as the Kurds, Arabs, Chaldeans, and Shiites. KHRW is the only local grass-roots organization which speaks their languages and understands their cross-cultural needs." The KHRW would be an example of the type of organization local law enforcement would benefit from by developing a partnership.

Partnership Implementation

To implement this partnership, a great deal of planning and preparation is necessary.

While typically the police and the community must share responsibility for identifying and solving problems, the police are better positioned to take the lead on developing a partnership. It is the responsibility of both to anticipate the changing community needs and law enforcement's responsibility to act on those changes.

The first step in this process is to begin or enhance working relationships with the identified stakeholders. This step is vital since all will have a stake in the outcome and all can provide valuable input to achieve the goal of providing efficient and effective police service and create positive relationships between the Iraqi migrants and the police. Following the relationship building phase, research would have to be completed to accurately identify the needs and desires of both the police department and the Iraqi community. This would entail working with Iraqi community members, church leaders, college professors and service providers to collect information. Once this information has been obtained, a more structured approach can be developed to address the issues and concerns raised. The next step would be to develop and provide advanced officer training to all public safety employees in an attempt to prepare them for dealing with the Iraqi community members.

These first few steps may take up to two years to properly implement, but are necessary to build a strong foundation to address this issue. The most important step in the process

will be the evaluation phase. In order to provide effective law enforcement service to the Iraqi community, law enforcement officials need to obtain constant feedback on the service being provided. This feedback can be obtained in person, by telephone, mail-in citizen surveys and community meetings where members of the Iraqi community are invited to discuss public safety's performance. It is important to note the evaluation of program progress and success should be ongoing, and not just at the conclusion of any particular effort or program.

Conclusion

This project provides the framework for law enforcement leaders to explore the impact a post-war migration of Iraqi citizens will have on local law enforcement. It is fairly obvious that an influx of Iraqi citizens may have a major impact; the issue will be whether law enforcement can prepare itself, and the rest of the community, to meet these challenges by taking advantage of the opportunities and reducing the potential risks.

There are many challenges to providing law enforcement services to a community who has grown accustomed to being policed by a corrupt profession. Immigrants who leave a society with a paramilitary, combat model of policing to an American police agency with a community policing philosophy will provide challenges for both law enforcement officials and community leaders. Iraqi migrants will assimilate to life in the United States. Police leaders have the choice of being proactive to develop a positive working relationship with them or allow someone else to fill the leadership void.

Thomas Jones is a Lieutenant and seventeen year veteran of the Oceanside Police Department. Lieutenant Jones currently oversees the Departments' Special Enforcement Section and is the commander of the Department's Special Weapons and Tactics team. He is currently attending California POST Command College and is conducting research on the impact a post-war migration of Iraqi citizens would have on California law enforcement.